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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## VISION IN EDUCATION

SIR:

In connection with the article by Hanford Henderson on "The New Education" in the May number of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW I am reminded that some years ago I asked two rather large groups of people engaged in educational work, mostly in connection with the public schools, and all of them men and women of maturity of thought and experience and holding important positions, whether they considered it a disadvantage to have been subjected to the prescribed courses for undergraduates common in the earlier days, and whether in the light of their experiences they would consider their chances of being properly educated improved by the freedom of the modern elective system. Almost without exception they held to the prescribed and well-balanced course.

Those subjects alone educate which afford abiding and life-long interests, and, it may be added, interests which increase in appealing power as people age. It is clear that by such a test bodily prowess beyond serving as means to ends has, by being made too much of, caused damage to many of our youth. It is pitiful to see the exploitation of the physical vigor of young men by the crowds which are seeking simply an hour's entertainment. False standards are set up amongst the youth and sums of money out of all proportion to the ends gained are expended. Physical exercise is a means to an end. Physical directors are under temptation to reverse this. Domestic science and indeed all college exercises that promote bodily skill or efficiency are concerned with means. The ends of life are spiritual. The Kingdom of Heaven is not won by eating or drinking or being clothed in fine linen. It is entered by getting into contact with one's fellows in terms of interests that will not vanish.

For students preparing for life to become proficient only in the means to life and not be made intelligent as to what constitutes life's fullest interests, is tragical. To leave college unacquainted with the humanities, history, biography, literature, science, mathematics, the fine arts, the art of government, the languages of the governing nations of the world, philosophy, is to go out uneducated and bearing credentials that will carry but a little way. David Swing, said that we go to the primary school to learn words, to the grammar and high school and college to learn yet more words, but until we come to words put together by Dante, Goethe, Milton, Shakespeare, we are uneducated beings.

Men learn to dig coal, to build roads, to fabricate all sorts of material, to write and print books, to found schools, colleges and universities, to construct

furniture and cloth,—for what? Simply and only that human beings may be able to get together to learn what is good, beautiful and true and to bring the same to pass. For, if they have solidly learned to recognize and love these things, because human nature and its powers are of the texture and have affinity with these, they will seek to embody them in practice. Parents will then come to distinguish between a house and a home, farmers between their children and their farms; manufacturers and merchants will learn that their occupations derive all their significances from association with men and women, and that no class can without peril be exploited either to build up the fortunes of another class or provide conveniences or comforts for still a third, even if that third be the great buying public. In short, all workers of whatever order and intelligence, and concerned in whatever work and toiling under whatever conditions, are, if they be anything, servants to those in need about them and willing servants too because of what they have received in their turn.

The evil of education is the same which attends upon business, government, the professions. It is the lack of vision, of perspective, of understanding that men are always to be regarded as ends and not as means, that no real return can ever be made for work done save by appreciation, gratitude, love or the consciousness of seeing men made free by the service rendered, and that financial and material returns are only to enable men and women to go forward to further service. And this view cannot be adequately established outside of the teaching of the humanities.

Mr. Henderson is right in his general programme. The years from 16 to 22 are peculiarly sacred and ought to be dedicated to holy things. There is time enough to acquire technical skill but not time for acquiring spiritual vision. Technical skill in language, especially English, control of the hand, body and oral expression, should be developed before this period, but for these six years every child should be nourished on the world classics whether embodied in history, biography, art, science, human life or what not,—so that the eternal values found only in exquisite form and wealth of substance may be their guide, their stimulus, their fulfillment.

Assuming these things to be so, wherein lies the sense of allowing young people at the immature age at which most of them enter college, to cast about at random for food on which to nourish their souls? It may be justly affirmed that nineteen out of twenty young people would be vastly better served in the long run by being held rigidly to wisely directed courses of study which permit little variation until they reach the age of twenty or twenty-two. To some it may seem that such views are the marks of age; yet to Aristotle is attributed the remark that only after passing the meridian of life is the golden wool gathered. Certain it is that if one would seek the roots of poor teaching and the lack of real personal power in the schools, he will find them in the poverty of training which magnifies the doing of things and minimizes reflection upon life.

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